

PATRICIA ALFORD

Job's Wife

Mrs. Job is on holiday.
 The servants are gone.
 The children are gone.
 The ox and the sheep are gone.
 The house is gone.
 It was all
 so heavy.

And besides, God, being what He is,
just, will probably give it all back.
 He'll probably give it all back threefold
 and, to tell the truth, at her age,
 ten more pregnancies she's not exactly up to.

Job sits in the ashes scratching himself with a pot shard.
 "Curse God," advises Mrs. Job,
 in hope of her freedom.
 If Job would just get up out of the ashes
 they might go traveling—
 camp at the edge of the sea.
 Job could go fishing. It would be quiet.
 The sun would rise and set;
 all she'd have to do is sit in the sand;
 watch the shore birds scatter
 and return, scatter and return
 with each breath of the sea.
 She'd cook over a little twig flame
 the fish Job caught.
 They could travel to a land where the gods are not so cruel—
 No, there is no land like that—
 They could stay with her mother.

The old woman would know how to make a salve for his skin.
 They could sleep under the stars,
 follow dogs down the road.

Job, however, is in love with suffering,
 so Mrs. Job stands nearby
 and watches him scrape away his old flesh.
 Perhaps he will excavate the young man she married
 and a time they were not burdened
 with sheep, oxen, servants and children.

Mrs. Job misses the baby,
 the weight on her hip, the smell of its hair.
 But no, there is no baby,
 just grown men and their wives who resent her
 and daughters who live far away.

If Job would just look up for a second
 and see her standing under this tree,
 he'd see her as she was and they would walk off together.
 He'd eat dates offered between her lips.
 She'd lick honey from his fingers.
 They'd flatten the new spring grass with the weight
 and warmth of their bodies.
 But he doesn't look up.
 Those black, ponderous and flapping vultures,
 Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar,
 block his view.
 They are such good friends.
 And they have come from so far away.
 With their advice heavier and more valuable than cattle,
 lowing, "you must have done something wrong, Job.
 Just say you are sorry. God only punishes the wicked."
 But isn't it true that Job *is* blameless?
 Nothing was ever Job's fault.
 Blamelessness is a hard act
 and look where it's gotten them.
 He's not patient, thinks Mrs. Job
 as she pulls her shawl over her head.
 He's stubborn,
 like his God.